

# Castlemaine Naturalist

September 2015

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Monthly newsletter of the  
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Mistletoe Bird - photo by Joy Weatherill

## **Dukie and The Eggs** Max Schlachter

When I was in primary school I had a friend named Ryan Duke who was considered to be just about the worst kid in my grade. Looking back it seems odd that we were mates as I was generally a pretty well-behaved goody two-shoes and Dukie was the exact opposite.

I distinctly remember one weekend when Dukie came to my place for a visit and we headed down to the Saratoga cricket oval to pass some time, as you do when you're twelve. After knocking a ball around for a while we came across two Plover's eggs (we only ever called Masked Lapwings Plovers) in the middle of the oval. Dukie had his heart set on taking the eggs; I was dead against it. It might sound like I was an environmentally enlightened child but in fact I was mostly worried about what trouble we might get in for it - I convinced Dukie to let them be. And sure enough as we walked home a man stopped us at the top of the hill and demanded that we hand over the eggs! I don't think he believed us when we said that we didn't have them.

There is a point to this story. On my way to our latest committee meeting I was going past the junior campus of the Castlemaine Secondary College and noticed a Lapwing crouching on the ground. I pulled up nearby to get a better look and thirty seconds later my Carol street neighbour Les came past with his Yorkshire terrier named Maggie. Off went the Lapwing to attack Les and Toby, and in its place were revealed two young chicks.

The two chicks had very different ideas about what was the best thing to

do in this situation. One of them, the more outgoing one I believe, immediately ran for cover in mad zigzags. The other, crouching low and still, did the perfect imitation of a fluffy brown pebble. Meanwhile, Les waved a stick around above his head as the adult birds dived low, and Maggie the terrifying terrier leapt about the place and barked with unbounded excitement.



It only took a few minutes for Les and Maggie to walk out of range. With the intruders safely seen off a parent returned to shelter the chicks and the



scene returned to its former arrangement, the chicks well concealed beneath their guardian.

Almost every time I see Lapwings I think about the Saratoga cricket oval and often of the incident of Dukie and the eggs. It's funny how that can happen.

## **Alaska – the frozen north (?)**

Nigel Harland

Whilst on holiday last year we met a couple who live in Fairbanks and they suggested we might like to come there one day. The thought had never occurred to us, so we investigated and liked what we found. We went on a four week excursion in June and liked what we found even more. We

spent four days in Vancouver, which is a delightful city and could have spent more time there. We then embarked on a cruise ship to spend the next week.

I had never been on a cruise ship before and was not expecting very much, particularly because there were 2000 other people competing for space. How wrong I was. The ship did most of its sailing during the night and most days we found ourselves in a new place in the morning. Our ports of call were Ketchikan, Juneau and Skagway and we arranged excursions in each place.

Strangely enough, the trips in Ketchikan and Juneau were both boat trips – off one and onto another! In Ketchikan we went on a trip to see how crabs were caught, but the highlight was a boat trip from Juneau to a couple of majestic glaciers on the Inside Passage. We passed many sea birds on the way, but the boat was going too fast for me to identify many of them. The scenery was spectacular with snow-capped mountains on each side and gradually there was more ice in the water, which provided a resting place for sea otters and seals. The boat had to manoeuvre through the ice to the glaciers, finding places to stop very close to the faces, which were cracking large pieces into the sea.

The commentary on the boat made no mention of global warming and I asked if there was a reason for this. I was told that it would have been controversial to mention it on board, but there is little doubt that the glaciers are becoming much shorter as the years go by. My own view used to be fairly ambivalent, but having seen the evidence, I now have little doubt. I also learned some geographical facts, firstly that Juneau is the State Capital of Alaska, with roughly 20,000 people. Secondly, there are no roads connecting Juneau to anywhere else. The only way in is by boat or plane.

In Skagway we took a trip into the high country by bus and had more time to identify birds on the route. We also saw our first black bear, much too agile to pose for a photo! The trip back down was by train along a very scary track looking several thousand feet down. The driver slowed down when things of interest appeared. So, back on the boat for a day spent cruising the inside passage and lapping up the scenery.

The final day at sea was spent sailing to Seward. Time to pack up things for the next stage of the trip – another benefit of cruising is that you can unpack on arrival and do nothing else for a week. The rain caught up with us, previously the weather had been unusually dry, but it didn't really matter now. Another highlight of the voyage was the number of whales that we saw, but I'll leave that for next month.



Clockwise from top:  
Kittiwake; Bald Eagle  
Crab  
Glacier terminus





Left: Seals

Below:  
Sea Otters





## Photo Observations



Debbie Worland: Pink-eared Ducks with Hardheads at the golf course, August 10

## A note on "Bendigo's botanical wonders"

Chris Timewell

At the August 2015 CFNC general meeting, Rod Orr's presentation on the plants of the Bendigo region was quite amazing. There were photos and stories about flora species that are familiar to us in Castlemaine, and many others specific to the different habitats near Bendigo - particularly to the north (e.g. Kooyora, Whipstick).

One of the good news stories that Rod spoke about was some recent attempts to reintroduce critically endangered orchids back into the wild. Radio National's "Off Track" program hosted by Anne Jones recently told the story of the recovery efforts of a team including Julie Whitfield and others on the Yellow-lipped Spider Orchid.

You can find it on the RN website, or follow the link posted on ours.

### THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER

#### The Last Frontier

The Ross Ice Shelf in Antarctica is a formidable plate of ice the size of France, uninhabited and deadly. The sheer cliffs of the Byrd Glacier tower above the sea ice and to early explorers formed the great barrier to their exploration endeavors. Ross Island is a home to polar - adapted wildlife such as the Weddell Seal which spends the entire year in Antarctica. As the summer approaches, the frozen surface of the Ross sea begins to fracture and dissolve. Above the colonies of seal, Adelie Penguin and marauding Killer Whale, the fractured and tortured ice tongue of the Mt. Erebus Glacier sweeps off the slopes of the planet's most southerly active volcano, towering almost four thousand meters into the polar sky.

This presentation by wildlife photographer Jason Edwards will focus on the environment and the species that inhabit the Ross Ice Shelf and Ross Island, and the researchers who brave the harsh wilderness to study them.

## From the business meeting

Members of Strezlecki Bushwalking Club are coming to Castlemaine on the weekend of 19/20th of September and would like to do a walk with our group on the Saturday - suggestion to walk along the railway line track from Muckleford to Maldon with a car shuffle. They intend to walk with FOBIF on the Sunday along Fryers Ridge.

The annual **Bird Count** is on the first weekend in December - volunteers wanted - keep the date clear.

Could members please check at home for missing Club **name tags** ( they often like to go home with their owners) - new ones will be issued if confirmed missing.

There will be a **Roadside Cleanup** on Saturday, November 21st.

Our traditional **Wednesday Wildflower Walks** program will commence on September 16 for four or five consecutive weeks. Excursions will start from the "octopus" opposite the Castle motel at 4 pm sharp.

An appointed leader will take us to an area in the surrounds of Castlemaine exhibiting a variety of flowering natives at the time. We will spend about an hour at the location.

Bring field guides, notebook, magnifying glass, cameras etc, and appropriate footwear.

## Observations

- ◆ Reports of local Magpies imitating the call of a Koel, and an Emu which laid an egg
- ◆ Two Echidnas photographed digging in Landcare ripping lines in Happy Valley - they were apparently seen coming from Kalimna Park and crossing the Happy Valley road to get there - Christine K
- ◆ Chris Timewell asked for observations of Pied Currawongs in the next month to establish the time they leave
- ◆ Rita had a Restless Flycatcher in the yard recently - first for 20 years
- ◆ Jan Orr on July 30 saw at least 7 Swift Parrots in the Kamarooka
- ◆ Geraldine - Natasha reported Nodding Greenhoods along the railway line at Muckleford
- ◆ One or two Boobook Owls sometimes seen in Cypress on Froomes rd.
- ◆ Max reported Ravens with young in a Yellow Box in Carol St.

<p><b>Disclaimer:</b> The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club</p>
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# Castlemaine Field Naturalists

## Coming events

**Fri September 11 meeting:** Speaker JASON EDWARDS: Wildlife and research at the Ross Shelf, Antarctica

**Sat September 12 field trip:** The Whipstick (held over from last month)

**Wednesday September 16:** First Wednesday Wildflower Walk, 4pm

**Fri October 9 meeting:** Speaker ANDREW SKEOCH: Listen to the wild.

**Sat October 10 field trip:** Fryers Ridge

**Fri November 13 meeting:** Speaker JULIE WHITFIELD: Butterflies

**Fri December 11 meeting:** Members night

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**General meetings** - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

**Club website** - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

### Subscriptions for 2015

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

### 2015 Committee

President:	Nigel Harland		5474 8246
Secretary:	George Broadway	georgebroadway@bigpond.com	5472 2513
Treasurer:	Elvyne Hogan		
Geraldine Harris	5474 2244	Richard Piesse	0448 572 867
Max Schlachter	5472 1594	Noel Young (Editor)	5472 1345

[ email newsletter material to: [noel.young@optusnet.com.au](mailto:noel.young@optusnet.com.au) ]

**Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.  
Inc #A0003010B**